Interview with MGEN Raymond Murray, USMC (Ret.) former commanding officer of the 5th Marines. Present at formation of the 1st Marine Provisional Brigade, and at Pusan, Inchon, Seoul, and Chosin Reservoir Campaign. Conducted by Jan K. Herman, Historian, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Washington, DC, 9 July 2001. (Died 2004 at age 91.)

Did you get the package I sent you with the information about Dr. Lessenden?
Yes I did, and I received the pictures this morning.

Great. Do you remember those?
Oh, yes. Very well.

There's the one where you're seated near the tent with a look of consternation on your face.
That was outside of Seoul. We were trying to crack a real hard nut and it wasn't working very well. I was trying desperately to figure out a solution to our problem.

Well you must have figured out something because you succeeded.
We finally managed to succeed but at some cost.

I have several questions for you. Hopefully the material I sent you helped refresh your memory. If not, maybe I can refresh it with my questions.
You started out with the 1st Marine Provisional Brigade. There was a real emergency and you headed to Korea. What kind of preparation did you have? Did you leave from Camp Pendleton?
Yes.

How was all that put together on such short notice?
The 5th Marines had been a pretty stable organization for almost a year. We were at peak strength. The doctor who wrote the two articles you sent me made one mistake. He said that there were only two battalions and each battalion had only two companies. That's not correct. We had three battalions but each battalion had only two companies. Each company had only two platoons instead of the normal three. When we got the word that we had to go, they immediately scraped around the base and took people from wherever they could find them to form the third platoons of the two rifle companies in each battalion. But we did sail with only two companies instead of three per battalion.
We had been training for almost a year. As I said, it was a fairly stable organization. The other units were right here--the artillery units, the tank units, the various components that go into making up a task force, which a brigade is. It was just hard work to get everything packed and get it aboard ship.

Had you discussed any medical preparations at all?
None other than the standard preparations. I had known [CAPT Eugene] Hering since I was a second lieutenant and he was a jaygee in China. When he came aboard, he organized the medical portion of the brigade.

He had a considerable amount of experience in World War II.

Oh yes, with the 2nd Division all through World War II.

What do you remember about him as a person?

He was very knowledgeable about the medical business and he spent most of his career with the Marines. So he knew the field medical setup and what was required. He was affable and a good golfer. I liked him very much. He aggravated some people, especially other doctors.

That's not surprising. He really thought of himself more as a Marine than as a member of the Navy.

I think that's right. Anyway, he took care of the medical planning and he did it well.

How did you get over to Korea?

We went over on a regular APA.

Any memories of the crossing?

We were originally scheduled to go into Japan but things got so tight in the perimeter that they sent us directly into Korea. We landed at Pusan.

What are your recollections of Pusan at that time? I know it was filled with refugees.

Filled with refugees. There was a lot of hustle bustle but we didn't stay there long. We debarked and went immediately up behind the front lines which were a little beyond the vicinity of Masan.

Were there any medical problems involved with being at Pusan?

The brigade took care of those things. Bud [Hering] had insisted on including some fogging machines in the equipment we took and they ran them all through our assembly area. Initially, the thing that bothered us most was heat exhaustion. It was terribly hot and humid. After 3 weeks on the ship the troops had gotten a little out of condition. As we went into our first combat, within a couple of days after arriving, I had a lot of heat exhaustion casualties. No heat stroke, but a lot of heat exhaustion.

When you first got to Pusan, there were reports that several Marines were victims of either friendly fire or wounds self-inflicted while cleaning weapons. These occurrences prompted one physician to speculate that many undertrained men were clearly more dangerous to themselves than they were to the enemy. Do you remember any of that?

No. I don't think any of that occurred in the 5th Marines. We had only one incident of a Marine firing a rifle at a ghost out there. In the brigade headquarters one night they opened fire; it was like the 4th of July. They were shooting in every direction at shadows. But not in the 5th Marines. We had very good fire discipline.

With the exception of Dr. Hering and some of the other senior physicians, and there weren't too many of those around, most of the other doctors there at the very beginning were greenhorns. They were products of what was known as the "Doctor's Draft." They were fellows who had gotten their education at Uncle Sam's expense, probably toward the end of World War II and, when the war ended, they were discharged. Then suddenly the war in Korea was on and these guys were called up. Most of them had very little

experience as far as combat was concerned. It was said that you didn't want to be the first guy wounded in Korea. Do you recall any of those physicians and their skills?

I don't. I certainly never heard any complaints about the treatment. I'm sure some of the doctors within the regiment didn't have a lot of experience. I don't remember how much [Chester] Lessenden had. He was my regimental surgeon.

He had had some experience during World War II. He was a lieutenant commander by that time.

I don't recall that we had any real problems in the early days. We had a lot of casualties but everything seemed to move pretty smoothly.

When the plans were being made for Inchon, Dr. Lessenden, in his recollections, recalled that you personally took time to explain what his duties would be as the regimental surgeon. Do you recall any of that?

I don't recall taking time to explain what his duties were but if he said so, I guess I did.

Do you have any memories at all of the kind of care your men received during the Inchon landing and directly afterward?

Everything seemed to run smoothly as far as I was concerned. Of course they got their initial triage at the battalion station. Then they came back to regiment. We were more or less a pass through, checking to make sure they were stable, and then we sent them back to the brigade hospital, which for quite a while, was on a train. There was a car that was rigged up as a traveling hospital. We were moving so fast back and forth in the perimeter. We fought three battles in about 3 weeks.

This was all before Inchon.

Yes. But at Inchon and beyond things worked very smoothly. So far as I know, we never had any problem with our evacuation of casualties and their treatment.

In his written recollections, Dr. Lessenden recalls discussing the planning for crossing the Han and how casualties from the other side might be evacuated. He mentions conferring with you on this issue and that you seemed hyper. Do you remember any of that?

I vaguely remember discussing how to get the casualties back. Actually, the reason I was hyper was because our intelligence indicated that there was nothing on the other side of the river, opposite of where we were going to cross. There was a little hill on the other side but supposedly it was unoccupied. So I planned to make an administrative crossing rather than a standard assault crossing. But I did send the reconnaissance company, which was attached to me at the time, ahead over the river. They were over earlier in the evening just after dark. They had swum across. They also had some rubber boats. They were to scout the area and make sure there was no opposition. If there wasn't they were to signal us to come on over. We were going to go over in a column and get people across as fast as we could. Well, when they got over there they didn't find anything initially so they signaled us to come on across. But about that time the whole hillside opened up. There was a battalion of North Koreans that had concealed themselves in that hill pretty well.

So, we had to change all of our plans before daylight and make an assault landing instead of an administrative crossing.

What's the difference between an administrative and an assault crossing?

In an administrative crossing, you get across as fast as you can without opposition. You don't have to form waves of assault troops and keep a distance between the waves so you don't get everybody killed at once. In an assault landing, you're prepared to fight your way across.

So you had to change your plans in the middle.

We had to change our plans overnight, which we did and crossed the next morning. The next morning the opposition had left. I guess they figured they had repulsed us and that we weren't going to cross. I assume they went back to Seoul except for a few snipers that fired at the troops going across. I don't recall that we lost anybody crossing the river, which we did without difficulty. We then moved up toward Seoul. So the problem of moving back across the river never arose.

When you got to Seoul, you found that the North Koreans had really made a shambles of it. Do you have any memories of what it took to clean it up?

It took us three or four days to take the city and once we took it we went right on through it so I really don't know what was done in the way of preventive measures. I'm sure they ran the fogging trucks throughout the city. I think they used DDT and it sure worked against the bugs. Of course, we discovered it had side effects later on.

After Seoul, you got ready to land on the east coast.

At Wonsan.

But because they had to clear the mines you ended up on what became known as "Operation Yo-Yo."

Yes. We'd go north along the coast in the morning, then turn around and go south in the afternoon. Then at night, we'd turn around and go north again. We kept that up for about two or three days.

Do you remember what the conditions were like aboard ship?

It was fairly crowded but not overcrowded. Of course, it's never pleasant for the troops aboard a transport ship. They're stacked about six or eight high on canvas bunks. It's not pleasant in the best of circumstances. I don't recall that we had any serious problems, medically.

And then, once you got to Wonsan, you found that the South Koreans had already taken the place and Bob Hope had been there. You Marines were pretty upset to come ashore to this situation.

We were upset in the first place for having to go around and make another amphibious landing because I felt that we should have moved from Seoul across the country. There's a long valley that goes from Seoul to Wonsan. I felt we could cut across in just a few days and have gotten to Wonsan overland. I was upset about that to begin with. It was very anticlimactic to come ashore and find that Bob Hope had already been there and the South Koreans were way on up the line. But we got enough fighting a little later on.

I've already interviewed a bunch of Marines who were up there with you. One of the physicians I've spoken with told me what it was like to practice medicine up there at Chosin. One thing in particular that always comes up when I talk to Marines who were at the Reservoir were those infamous shoe pacs. Do you have any comment to make about those?

I suppose they would have been good under some circumstances but they weren't very good for the kind of stuff that we had to put up with. Your feet sweat in them and unless you changed your socks pretty frequently, you were quite likely to get frostbite. I always managed to change my socks because I was in a position where I could do it. I never got frostbite even though I was pretty damn cold. All of us were. The way I dried my socks was to put them against my body and let the body heat dry them out.

Frostbite was a very big problem. After the Chinese attacked and we were fighting day and night steadily, you reached a point where you just didn't give a damn. You were just trying to stay alive and weren't too worried about frostbite.

Suddenly you had a tremendous number of casualties.

I've heard stories about how the blood froze on some of these wounds and I've often wondered if that were true. And if so, if that might have saved a lot of people by keeping them from bleeding to death.

Several of the physicians and several of the corpsmen commented that the wounds would actually freeze and it would stop the flow of blood. Whereas in a normal environment these people would have bled to death, here the blood flow stopped almost completely. A regular battle dressing would do the job. The main problem was getting the wounded out of there. I guess you saw firsthand the wounded strapped to every vehicle.

On my jeep coming down, I had two lashed across the hood and several in the jeep itself who were wounded and couldn't walk. All vehicles had that.

When you got back down to Hagaru, the engineers had already done a pretty good job of hacking out an airstrip so C-47s could come in. Do you remember any of that?

Oh, yes. I watched them come in and watched them go out.

Did you see Dr. Hering there at that time?

I don't remember any specific incident but I'm sure he was there.

The doctors had set up a method of screening patients. Dr. Lessenden had some frostbite of the feet and he would look at the particular Marine and if his feet were worse than his, then he got to get on the plane. And if he wasn't, he had to stay. Do you remember any of that.

Now that you mention it, I remember Les telling me that that was his method of screening patients. The most vivid recollection I have of Les and his crew was when we were on the way down from Yudam-ni. He was in a hut and there was a huge pot of some kind that belonged to the people who lived there. They built a fire under it and were thawing c-rations in it to give to the wounded. He and the other doctors worked day and night to take care of these people. I don't know when they slept.

The picture you sent of Les and me. The medal I'm presenting to him is the Legion of Merit. We had recommended him for that medal for his superlative effort as we were coming back down from the Reservoir. I never knew anybody who worked any harder than he did.

I wish I had had the chance to have met him before he died.

I saw him at the first reunion that we had.

His wife has been very kind in sharing the pictures with me and his letters and stories. He must have been a very remarkable man.

He was a remarkable man. I had the greatest respect for him. He was a fine gentleman, a very caring doctor, and an absolutely tireless worker. Under those circumstances he did everything he possibly could to make those boys comfortable and see that they were taken care of.

You were never wounded yourself so you had no requirement for medical care, did you?

No. On one occasion outside of Seoul, an armor-piercing shell hit the window casement right above my head and exploded. Fortunately, it wasn't high explosive. This was about 2 o'clock in the morning and I had been asleep. I awoke sitting straight up with the room briefly full of flame. I discovered later on that the only thing that happened to me was that a piece of shrapnel had just barely hit the very tip of my nose and it was bleeding a little bit. I didn't notice it but Les saw it and said, "Would you like me to put you in for a Purple Heart?" I said, "No, I've already got a Purple Heart and don't need another one. He put a bandage on it, even though I don't think it needed a bandage.

So Dr. Lessenden was with you when the shell hit?

That was my headquarters and the aid station was close by. That shell wounded a lot of people. It wounded my exec who was asleep on the floor. A piece of shrapnel hit him in the leg and severed a nerve. He had to be evacuated and sent home. It also wounded several people who were also nearby. The armor piercing part of the shell hit a man in the face and tore most of his face off, blinding him. They saved him, rebuilt his jaw, but he was blind forever. I think there were about 14 people wounded.

Do you remember the evacuation from Hungnam?

Only that we got back aboard ship. The ship I was on, which was some kind of passenger ship, was very crowded. Not only did we have our Marines, but we also had a lot of refugees.

Had they separated the casualties at this point and put them on another ship or were you all together?

There were a lot of casualties aboard this ship. I don't recall whether there was a hospital ship up there or not.

The *Consolation* was up there.

Then probably the worst casualties had gone there.

You then went back to Pusan. Is that right?

We went to the "Bean Patch."

After you all regrouped, what happened? Did you stay with the 5th Marines?

Yes. We were there at Masan a week or two trying to get things back in shape. I began training again because the troops had had a horrible experience. They were almost like animals and things were not tightened up. So we tighten them up a bit and did some training to get them back in the groove again. Then we were ordered up to a place called Yongdong-po. I had battalions in three different locations. There was no fighting except that we sent out patrols. There was a North Korean division supposedly behind the lines doing guerrilla fighting and we sent out patrols to try to run those people down. We had some fights and lost a few people in those fights but there was no heavy fighting going on.

Then later, we started moving back up north and about the 10th or 12th of March I was relieved and came home.

It's been 50 years since all this happened. Do you have any thoughts about the medical personnel--the corpsmen, the doctors--that you worked with in Korea?

Only a general statement that they all did a superb job. The corpsmen just did everything they were asked to do and more. They'd go out on their own to retrieve our wounded where the firing was going on. I'm sure we lost a lot of corpsmen that way. They just did a tremendous job, and so did all the doctors. I didn't hear of a single case where anyone complained about not being treated properly by any of the doctors. The only doctor I knew real well was Lessenden. I used to know the name of the other doctors who were in the regimental headquarters. I didn't know too well the ones who were down in the battalions.

General, I really appreciate you taking the time this afternoon.

I don't mind it at all. I just wish my memory was not so faded so that I could give you some more information.

Well, it all happened over 50 years ago.

It hardly seems possible. Sometimes it seems that it all happened just a few months ago. Well, it was a rare experience and one that I've cherished all my life to be able to lead that regiment.

But you wouldn't want to do it again.

No. And, to be honest, I'm in no physical shape to do it again.